

March 31, 2014

TESTIMONY OF PENNI MICCA SUBMITTED TO THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Raised H.B. No. 5593: AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Senator Coleman, Rep. Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Penni Micca. As a representative of Interval House, Connecticut's largest domestic violence intervention and prevention program, a member of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) Public Policy Committee, and Chair of the Connecticut Domestic Violence Fatality Review Sub-Committee (CDVFR), I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony pertaining to Raised H.B. No. 5593: An Act Concerning Domestic Violence. I am writing to urge you to support this bill and to talk to you about Section 1 in particular.

Financial relief as part of a restraining order is crucial. The purpose of civil restraining orders – the statutory intent - is SAFETY. SAFETY for domestic violence survivors requires economic security. Plain and simple, domestic violence impoverishes survivors of domestic violence and exposes them to increased risks of additional violence. An order for the respondent to vacate a residence does not offer adequate assistance if a survivor lacks the monetary resources to pay the rent or mortgage. It is also important that CT authorizes restraining orders that grant survivors possession and use of their vehicle and other personal items, regardless of the ownership of the items. Fear of having utilities shut off, no transportation and/or no money to put food on the table can be as terrifying to survivors (*especially parents*), as the violence and stalking they are already enduring.

I worked with a woman who tried desperately to leave the man who abused her for many years. She continually put off filing for a restraining order. She tried to prepare for leaving, but he undermined her employment and escalated his abuse. A mother of three, she would not be able to feed and house her family. Finally, she could not take the abuse any longer and she submitted an application for relief from abuse. An ex-parte order was issued and I attended the hearing with her. It was school vacation week. Normally a time of joy for children, she was nervous. The kids received breakfast and lunch at school on Mondays through Fridays. She was concerned about how she would manage to add fifteen meals and snacks to her already tight food budget. As she was relaying this information to me, her abuser walked into the court house wearing new khakis (crisp and fresh, sizing still intact), a new leather jacket and flashing a fancy new cell phone. It was quite a message, and she knew she would not receive a cent from him for as long as the order was in place. With that being said, she moved forward with the order. After a short period of time, he crept back into her life. She knew what he was doing but felt she had no other option. He knew her financial situation. He knew when she would be scraping by. First he came by with a bag of groceries and dropped them off. A violation of the order, but she needed that food. The visits became more frequent and longer as time went on. He would never give her cash. She was having a difficult time finding a job during the children's school hours and the kids were confused when they saw their father at the house. One day he didn't leave. She felt defeated and hopeless. He remained in the home for a number of months – until he beat her badly and was incarcerated; unable to meet his high bond. Her story is not unusual. Survivors of domestic violence often cite the fear of not being able to minimally support themselves and their children as an obstacle to their SAFETY.

Over the years of reviewing domestic violence fatalities, we have learned that limited options for economic stability overwhelmingly contributed to keeping victims trapped in relationships with violent abusers. This instability meant that they were unable to leave or delayed leaving their abusers. In many cases, restraining orders were considered, but financial fears were overwhelming.

Economic stability is at the nexus of a survivor safely leaving an abuser or staying in a dangerous relationship because options are limited. I urge you to support Raised H.B. 5593. It speaks to the statutory intent of civil restraining orders: SAFETY. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Penni Micca

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